



Land Use & Community Benefits Assessment Alternatives Evaluation Technical Memorandum

3.0 Introduction

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is evaluating multiple alignments for a potential new interstate in southwest Georgia. Possible land use impacts and community benefits resulting from the alternatives were evaluated. The study area boundary and alternative corridors are depicted in Figure 3.1.1 as well as the the corridor segments which will be discussed in more detail later in this section. The project team evaluated high-level impacts of each segment on land use and community benefits by applying rankings for specific performance measures.

The impact of the segment on its context according to a particular performance measure was ranked *positive*, *mixed impact*, or *negative*. Ranking conclusions were achieved through the use of GIS data, review of planning documents and maps, input from public meetings, or a combination of these sources. The 16 rankings for each segment were then blended into an overall result for that segment.

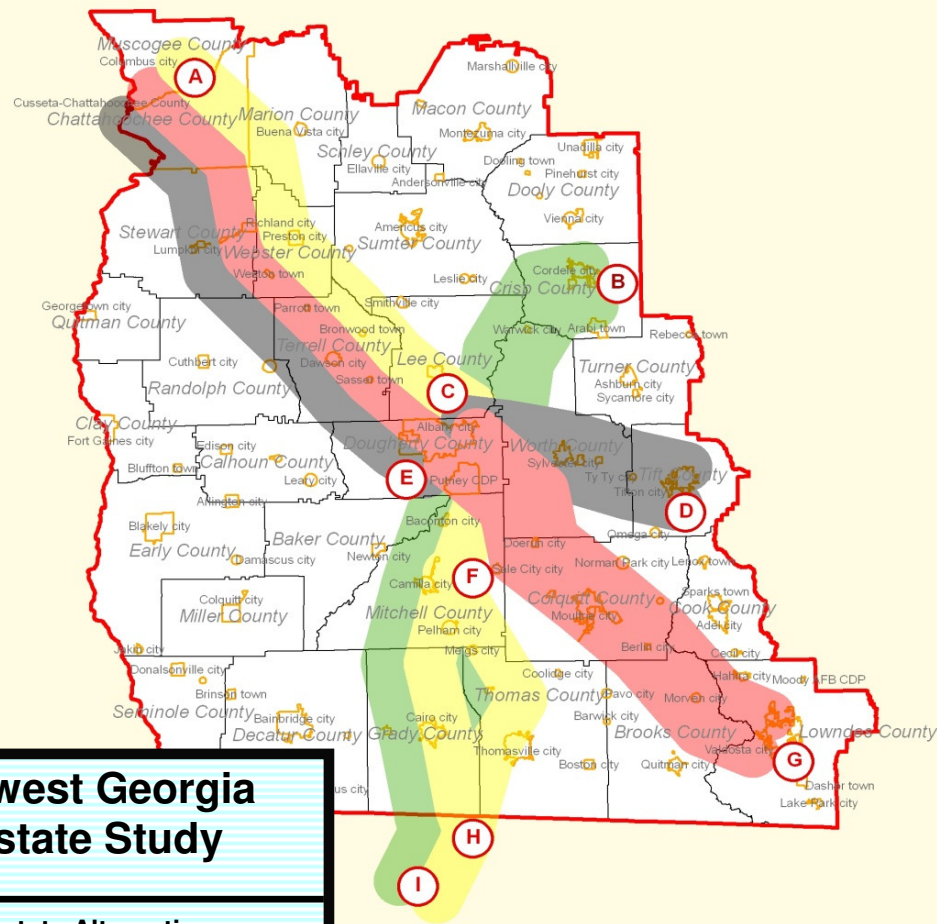
3.1 Purpose & Methods

The purpose of this Technical Memorandum is to describe how potential interstate alignments were evaluated in light of land use impacts and community benefits, and summarize final results which are the product of detailed data collection efforts. The detailed data which supports this Technical Memorandum can be found in Appendices A-E. The detailed analysis focused on the impacts on the sections of the alternatives in Georgia. Some data was collected for the areas in Florida but not at the level of detail as was the data for Georgia. If an alternative to Florida was recommended for further study or analysis, some of the data would be revisited.

The interstate segments were evaluated through the use of 16 performance measures. The selected performance measures were designed to reveal, individually or in concert with one another, high level potential impacts of an interstate to the broad categories of (1) land use and planning, and (2) community benefits. Community benefits were evaluated using a series of sub-categories including: access to services, social and environmental justice, and historic and cultural resources. The performance measures utilized are listed below.

Potential Interstate Alignments

Southwest Georgia Interstate Study

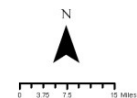


Southwest Georgia Interstate Study

Potential Interstate Alternatives

Segment Impacts Assessment for
Land Use & Community Benefits

Figure 3.1.1



Southwest Georgia Interstate Study



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3.1.1 Performance Measures

Land Use & Planning (7 measures were analyzed)

For the land use and planning analysis, the degree to which the alignment segments were consistent with the following criteria were evaluated.

- Consistent with Land Use Policies
- Consistent with Transportation Policies
- Consistent with Economic Development Policies
- Consistent with Zoning
- Compatibility with Adjacent Existing Land Uses
- Compatibility with Regional Context
- Impact on Prime Agricultural Lands

Prime Agricultural Lands (1 measure was analyzed)

For prime agricultural lands, the alignment's potential impact on the lands was considered.

Community Benefits (9 measures were analyzed)

For the community benefits analysis, the degree to which the alignment segments provided access to services, impacted social and environmental justice populations, and impacted historic and cultural resources was considered.

- Access to Services (3 measures)
 - Access to Healthcare Facilities
 - Access to Job Training Facilities
 - Access to Employment Centers
- Social and Environmental Justice (5 measures)
 - Impact on Residential Areas within ½ mile of Route
 - Impact on Populations in Poverty
 - Impact on Elderly Population
 - Impact on Population without High School Diploma
 - Creation of Geographically Isolated Neighborhoods
- Historic and Cultural Resources (1 measure)
 - Impact on Historic and Cultural Assets



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Eight possible alignment segments were evaluated, as denoted in Figure 3.1.1

- Albany-Columbus (Segment AC)
- Albany-Cordele (Segment BC)
- Albany-Tifton (Segment CD)
- Connector within Albany (Segment CE)
- Albany-Valdosta (Segment EG)
- Albany-Camilla (Segment EF)
- Camilla-Beachton through Grady County (Segment FH West)
- Camilla-Beachton through Thomas County (Segment FH East)

3.1.2 Detailed Scoring Inputs on Land Use Categories

Consistency with policies for land use, transportation, economic development, zoning, adjacent land uses, and regional context were scored for each location using relevant policy and locational themes.

For land use, rankings considered the policy stance on: maintaining rural character, environmental concerns, desire to prevent disruption to small towns or inhabited areas, controlling growth, and decline of town centers. For transportation, rankings considered the policy stance on: better connections, highway construction or expansion, alternative transportation modes rather than roadway expansion or improvement. For economic development, rankings considered the policy stance on: industrial development, desire to create regional hub, desire to promote tourism. For zoning, rankings considered whether or not there is an appropriate highway-oriented policy in place. For consistency with adjacent land uses, rankings considered compatibility with the existing land uses that the alignment is running through (residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, forested) as well as whether the alignment is bisecting or isolating portions of an urban core. For consistency with regional context, rankings considered the alignments' compatibility with regionally significant projects, regional infrastructure goals, regionally identified natural and cultural resources, regional concerns about land use including sprawl, and regional economic development goals.

3.1.3 Detailed Scoring Inputs on Community Benefits Categories

Community benefits measures within the categories of access to services, social and environmental justice, and historic and cultural assets were scored for each location using GIS data to determine potential impacts. Maps were generated based on the performance measures, and potential impacts were derived in terms of raw aggregate numbers of assets or persons possibly impacted within the



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potential impact area. “Potential impact area” is defined as the area enclosed by an offset of a half mile on either side of the alignment, i.e. it is a mile-wide swath running along the centerline of the alignment. This swath was used to determine potential impacts in lieu of an actual alignment, which has not yet been defined.

After these segments were analyzed in light of the land use and community benefits measures through evaluation of policy documents, GIS data, and public input, each segment was ranked in terms of its relative overall positive, negative, or mixed impact. Rankings for each segment based on the evaluation of land use and community benefits performance measure are documented in a matrix (see Appendix A-1, *Land Use and Community Benefits Performance Measures*). Green cells indicate a positive impact, yellow indicates a mixed impact (i.e. an approximate equal number of positive and negative impacts), and red cells indicate a negative impact. For example, under segment AC (Albany-Columbus), the performance measure “Access to Healthcare Facilities” has a positive (green) ranking. This means that possible interstate segment AC is projected to have a positive impact on healthcare access (due to the relatively high number of healthcare facilities near the possible interstate segment, which would increase access to healthcare).

3.1.4 Limitations and Intent of the Study

The study was undertaken on the premise that each possible segment was to be evaluated on its own merits, not in comparison to other segments, with all impacts being measured in raw aggregate numbers. Examining alignment segments using raw numbers (such as the number of historic and cultural assets potentially impacted by a segment) yielded a picture of the overall total impact a possible interstate would have on effected populations and/or resources. This means that the 81-mile long segment AC (Albany-Columbus) will naturally be perceived as having greater potential impact than the 2-mile long CE (Albany) connector segment.

This method of evaluation was purposely undertaken to provide an understanding of the real potential impacts of each individual segment over a comparative method that would equalize all segments on a “per mile” basis. The “per mile” method of evaluation seemed questionable to the team because the actual alignments are not known. The evaluation looked at wide swaths from 1 to 5 miles wide, wherein the alignment could take many paths. It was therefore deemed more useful to look at aggregate numbers of potential impact within the swath rather than on a per mile basis for a specific alignment that is unknown (as whatever alignment which would be chosen would undoubtedly shift within the swath).

If a potential alignment were to become a real alignment, additional study would be required to determine an actual route and real impacts. The current study serves as a tool for flagging potential



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high level, regional problems, guiding decision-makers, and identifying areas of concern for future planning.

3.2 Summary of Findings

Final results show that the Albany-Cordele segment (BC) has an overall positive impact on land use and provides community benefits. The Albany-Valdosta segment (EG) and the Albany-Tifton (CD) alignment have an overall slightly positive impact. The Albany-Camilla segment (EF), the Camilla-Beachton segment through Thomas County (FH East), and the connector segment within Albany (CE) have overall mixed impacts. The Albany-Columbus segment (AC) and the Camilla-Beachton segment through Grady County (FH West) have an overall negative impact on land use and do not provide many community benefits.

An overview of the results reveals that “*negative*” rankings were typically due to impacts on historic or cultural assets, land use (either conflicts with prime agriculture or inconsistencies with existing land use plans), or social justice. “*Positive*” rankings were typically associated with transportation, economic development, zoning, regional context, and access to services. “*Mixed*” rankings indicate that positive and negative outcomes are relatively equivalent with regard to land use and community benefits.

Table 3.2.1 provides a summary of the final results, by segment, for the land use and community benefits analysis. Rankings are presented on a color scale with dark green (*overall positive*), light green (*overall slightly positive*), yellow (*overall mixed impact*), light red (*overall slightly negative*) or dark red (*overall negative*). This final overall impact ranking per segment can be found at the bottom of each segment column in the row titled “Final Results.”



Southwest Georgia Interstate Study

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Table 3.2.1

Land Use and Community Benefits Performance Measures, Final Segment Results

	Segment AC	Segment BC	Segment CD	Segment CE	Segment EG	Segment EF	Segment FH West	Segment FH East
Consistent with Land Use Policies	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—
Consistent with Transportation Policies	0	+	0	+	+	+	+	0
Consistent with Economic Development Policies	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	0
Consistent with Zoning	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Compatibility with Adjacent Existing Land Uses	0	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
Compatibility with Regional Context	+	+	+	+	0	0	—	0
Access to Healthcare Facilities	+	+	+	0	+	0	0	0
Access to Higher Education Facilities	+	0	+	0	+	0	—	—
Access to Job Training Facilities	0	+	0	0	+	0	—	—
Access to Employment Centers	+	0	+	0	+	0	0	0
Access to Residential Population Areas	+	+	+	0	+	0	0	0
Impact on Populations in Poverty	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0
Impact on Minority Population	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0
Impact on Elderly Population	—	—	—	0	—	0	0	0
Impact on Population without HS Diploma	+	+	+	0	+	0	0	0
Impact on Cities / Villages / Subdivisions	—	—	—	0	—	0	+	0
Impact on Historic and Cultural Assets	—	0	—	+	—	+	0	0
Impact on Prime Agricultural Lands	—	0	0	+	—	0	—	—
Final Results	—	+	+	0	+	0	—	0

Key	+	Overall Positive Impact
	+	Overall Slightly Positive Impact
	0	Overall Mixed Impact
	—	Overall Slightly Negative Impact
	—	Overall Negative Impact



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3.3 Detailed Findings by Segment

The following presents an overview of the main findings per alignment segment. The segments along with the planning regions are displayed in Figure 3.1.2. For complete details, see Appendices A-E, which provides the full analysis of land use impacts and community benefits.

3.3.1 Albany-Columbus (AC)

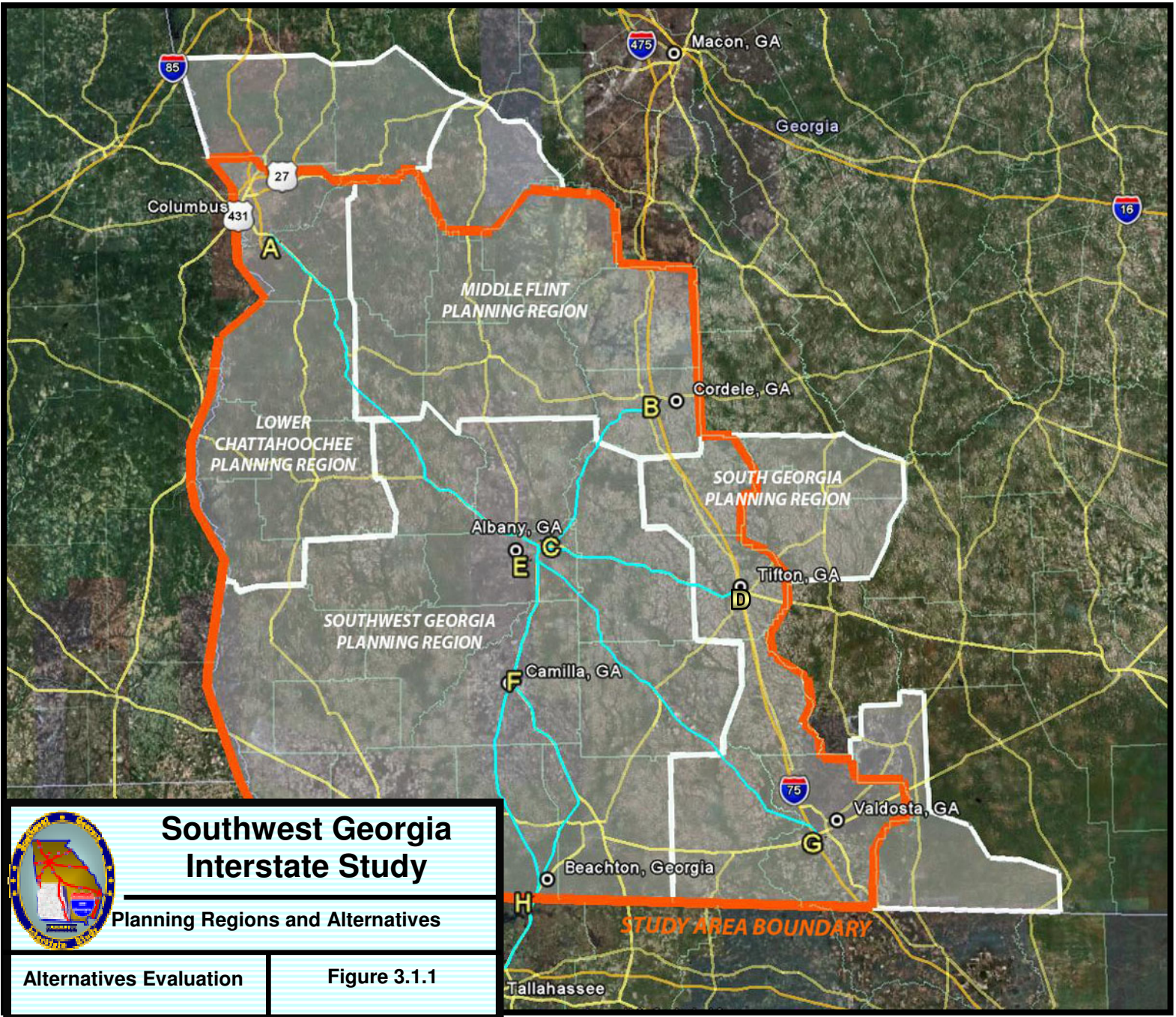
Segment AC is approximately 81 miles long and passes through six counties (Dougherty, Webster, Terrell, Stewart, Chattahoochee, and Muscogee) and three planning regions: Southwest Georgia (Albany), Middle Flint, and Lower Chattahoochee (Columbus). The segment has negligible impact from a regional perspective on Middle Flint. Impacts in Lower Chattahoochee and Southwest Georgia are both positive and negative, as discussed below.

Taking all land use and community benefits performance measures into consideration, final results show a somewhat negative (light red) impact for segment AC. Its most positive aspects are related to regional economic development goals and increasing accessibility to services; however it presents challenges with regard to land use, social justice and historic and cultural assets.

3.3.2 Land Use & Planning

The AC segment supports regional industrial clusters and economic goals in both the Albany and Columbus areas. The alignment is consistent with Dougherty County's goals for retaining and growing more business, including Albany's desire to become a regional business and tourist hub. It is possible that the alignment could serve to enhance opportunities for Stewart County (lower Chattahoochee region) and Terrell County (Southwest Georgia region), which have been identified within their regional contexts as counties in need of economic development. The segment is also consistent with regional transportation policy: the Southwest Georgia regional plan identifies US 19 in the Albany area as a corridor in need of widening, which seems to reflect a capacity need that is consistent with the AC alignment. Segment AC is consistent with projected future freight capacity needs linking Albany and Columbus.

On the downside, the segment conflicts with land use policy in multiple counties. It will contribute to substantial loss of prime farmland, and may exacerbate suburban sprawl around Albany and Columbus. It may conflict with the policy of protecting residential areas from incompatible uses in several counties, and could potentially impact other valued natural resources that the region seeks to protect, such as long leaf pine acreage. The segment passes nearby a regionally significant natural feature and habitat, the Swamp of Toa, and interstate-related development and growth could potentially impact this resource. The alignment seems to conflict with conservation land in





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Chattahoochee County, and may negatively impact the county's goal to maintain rural character. Also, much of the alignment is crossing regionally identified "significant groundwater recharge" areas; however recharge areas appear to be plentiful in the affected counties, in some cases covering the majority of the county's land.

It was estimated that some elements would have a mixed impact based on future planning of a potential actual alignment: The Southwest Georgia region seeks to stimulate development, protection, and flood management around Lake Kinchafoonee; the alignment could either help or hinder this goal. Additionally, the alignment has the potential to conflict with the north-south running "Chattahoochee Trace" route in the Lower Chattahoochee region - an identified regional and state bike and pedestrian corridor.

3.3.3 Community Benefits

Segment AC would have a very positive impact on accessibility to employment centers, hospitals and higher education facilities. The segment would link eight cities and 11 major employers.

In total the alignment could impact 28 populated places, whether cities, villages, or subdivisions – more than any other segment (though this is perhaps in part due to its greater length).

On the downside, this alignment has the highest potential negative impact of any segment on historic and cultural assets. According to GIS analysis, there are 481 historic and cultural assets in the potential impact area. "Potential impact area" is defined as the area enclosed by an offset of a half mile on either side of the alignment, resulting in a mile-wide swath running along the centerline of the alignment. Segment AC's 481 assets are substantially more than the 66 assets in the potential impact area of the next highest segment measure in this category, segment CD (Albany-Tifton). Segment CD is approximately 39 miles long; AC is therefore two times longer than CD but has seven times the number of assets potentially impacted, which indicates that the high number of assets potentially impacted along segment AC is more than a simple function of its greater length.

The segment may also encounter challenges with regard to social justice. Using data from block groups that intersect the alignment within a half mile on either side, it is estimated that 19.5% of the affected population is living below the poverty line. However it performs reasonably well in comparison to other segments. Segment CE (connector within Albany) had the greatest impact at 32.3%; segment EG (Albany-Valdosta) the least at 18.4%. Minority populations may also be negatively impacted: slightly less than half (45.5%) of residents in the affected block groups are minorities. There are three segments that present a greater impact on minority populations (BC [Albany-Cordele], CD [Albany-Tifton], and CE [connector with Albany]). Segment AC could also



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have a negative impact on the elderly population, who number approximately 2,600 within the block groups analyzed.

In summary, the final results show a somewhat negative (light red) impact for segment AC (Albany-Columbus).

3.4 Albany-Cordele (BC)

Segment BC is approximately 37 miles long and passes through three counties (Dougherty, Worth, and Crisp) and two planning regions: Southwest Georgia (Albany) and Middle Flint (Cordele).

Final results show a positive (dark green) overall impact for segment BC. The segment has a positive impact for both planning regions, as well as localized benefits. However, the segment does present challenges with regard to social justice. This is discussed below under Community Benefits.

3.4.1 Land Use & Planning

The BC segment supports planning goals in both Albany and Cordele. This route is anticipated to become a major truck freight corridor, a trend which will be enhanced by the construction of an interstate. In Albany, the city's goal to retain and attract new employers and to be a regional hub for both business and tourism is likely to be bolstered by an interstate connection. The Middle Flint RDC plan outlines an important regional initiative siting a large industrial corridor north of Cordele in Crisp County. The plan suggests that such a development would have positive repercussions throughout the planning region. This industrial corridor is sited to take advantage of I-75, but could benefit from being at the intersection of two interstates. The alignment is consistent with future projections for growing freight flows along this corridor. Also, Crisp County seeks to extend GA 300 to I-75, indicating a desire to connect to the interstate system.

On the downside, the segment conflicts with land use policies in Crisp and Worth Counties. Land use policies are defined as those policies intended to preserve rural character, protect the environment, protect town centers, or avoid uncontrolled growth. In Crisp County, the alignment as currently routed appears to conflict with Lake Blackshear, cutting through the southern portion of the lake. Lake Blackshear is an important regional energy and recreational resource with residential growth expected to occur around it. It abuts Georgia Veterans Memorial State Park, home to a championship-quality golf course. The regional plan calls the course "a major contributing factor to the park earning the title as Georgia's most visited state park." In 2003, visitors to the park exceeded one million.



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In Worth County, the alignment may conflict with the protected Flint River corridor, may have negative impacts on the communities it bisects in the county, and may exacerbate an already existing problem of residential sprawl from Albany. Worth County's Comprehensive Plan seeks to "preserve the rural character of the area" and protect from "encroaching development." Agriculture and forestry are considered base economies for the county. On the other hand, Worth is identified by the Southwest Georgia planning region as a county in need of economic development, which may be enhanced by an interstate. Industrial uses are being encouraged there, which would be well served by an interstate. If segment BC were ever to be built, it would be important for planners to balance the pros and cons in planning the route to achieve the best outcome.

3.4.2 Community Benefits

Segment BC is expected to increase accessibility to hospitals and technical schools, and appears to have almost no impact on historic and cultural assets, which is a positive. While this segment would link three cities, it does not provide access to any major employers.

In total the alignment could impact 15 populated places, whether cities, villages, or subdivisions.

On the downside, there may be challenges with regard to social justice. Using data from block groups that intersect the alignment within a half mile on either side, it is estimated that 29.6% of the affected population is living below the poverty line. Minority populations may also be negatively impacted: more than half (58.9%) of residents in the affected block groups are minorities. It could also have a negative impact on the elderly population, who number approximately 2,600 within the affected block groups.

In summary, the final results show a positive (dark green) impact for segment BC (Albany-Cordele).

3.5 Albany-Tifton (CD)

Segment CD is approximately 39 miles long and passes through three counties (Dougherty, Worth, and Tift) and two planning regions: Southwest Georgia (Albany) and South Georgia (Tifton).

Final results show a slightly positive (light green) impact for segment CD. The segment is consistent with transportation and economic goals, and has both positive and negative potential impacts for land use and planning. It presents some challenges with regard to social justice and historic and cultural assets.



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3.5.1 Land Use & Planning

The CD segment is consistent with transportation policies in Tift and Worth Counties. The alignment accurately reflects the projected growth of truck freight along this route, and would contribute to the goal to site industrial development in Sylvester (Worth County). The alignment is consistent with the goal of supporting agribusiness and attracting high quality business parks in Tift County. It would also support Dougherty County's goal to retain and attract new employers, and the City of Albany's desire to become a regional business and tourist hub. The alignment would serve the Southwest Georgia region's largest employer, the Marine Corps Logistics Base in Albany. The Southwest Georgia Regional Development Commission (RDC) plan considers it to be one of the highest need corridors for public infrastructure and services in the Southwest Georgia region.

On the downside, the segment presents several conflicts with land use policies. Land use policies are defined as those policies intended to preserve rural character, protect the environment, protect town centers, or avoid uncontrolled growth. The Worth County Comprehensive plan seeks to "preserve the rural character of the area" and protect from "encroaching development." Segment CD may exacerbate the trend of sprawl from Albany into Worth County. In Tift County, there are concerns about losing prime agriculture as well as protecting sensitive wetland environments along SR 82. The alignment may also negatively impact the protected Little River corridor near Tifton. Uncontrolled growth is a concern in the City of Tifton, which is a regional growth center. The alignment may also conflict with an identified regional and state bike and pedestrian corridor, i.e. the "Wiregrass" route.

3.5.2 Community Benefits

Segment CD would increase access to services including hospitals and higher education facilities. It would link seven cities and five major employers.

In total the alignment could impact 19 populated places, whether cities, villages, or subdivisions.

On the downside, there may be challenges with regard to social justice. Using data from block groups that intersect the alignment within a half mile on either side, it is estimated that 25.6% of the affected population is living below the poverty line. Minority populations may also be negatively impacted: more than half (52.2%) of residents in the affected block groups are minorities. It could also have a negative impact on the elderly population, who number approximately 3,600 within the affected block groups.

Regarding impacts upon historic features, segment CD crosses old pioneer roads and must be evaluated for impact to possible centennial family farms. According to GIS analysis, there are 50



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historic sites, 11 churches, and five cemeteries within a half mile of the alignment which could potentially be impacted.

In summary, the final results show a slightly positive (light green) impact for segment CD (Albany-Tifton).

3.6 Connector within Albany (CE)

Segment CE is approximately two miles long and lies within the City of Albany in Dougherty County, in the Southwest Georgia planning region.

Final results show a mixed (yellow) impact for segment CE. The segment is ranked either neutral or positive in most categories; however it receives a negative ranking and presents significant challenges with regard to social justice, particularly with regard to populations in poverty and minority populations. The alignment also faces possible, but perhaps avoidable, land use conflicts in the protected Flint River area.

3.6.1 Land Use & Planning

The CE segment is consistent with Dougherty County's goals for retaining and growing more business, including Albany's desire to become a regional business and tourist hub. Segment CE is identified as one of the highest need corridors for public infrastructure and services in the Southwest Georgia planning region.

On the downside, the segment may present a conflict with land use policies with regard to environmental protection at a regional scale. Development associated with an interstate may negatively impact the nearby protected Flint River corridor.

3.6.2 Community Benefits

As a two-mile connector segment, CE would have no notable impact on accessibility to services. It would serve one city (Albany) and one major employer, according to Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) information (see Appendix E for more detail).

In total the alignment could impact eight populated places, whether city, village, or subdivision.

On the downside, there are significant challenges with regard to social justice along this segment. Using data from block groups that intersect the alignment within a half mile on either side, it is estimated that 32.3% of the affected population is living below the poverty line. This is the highest percentage of any segment in this category. Minority populations would also be negatively impacted:



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more than three-quarters (77.2%) of residents in the affected block groups are minorities. This again is the highest percentage of any segment. However, since segment CE is so short, these high percentages do not translate into higher actual counts of persons affected when compared to other segments. Still, the higher percentage may reflect a higher density of population and therefore requires further study to assess real impacts.

In summary, the final results show a mixed (yellow) impact for segment CE (connector with Albany).

3.7 Albany-Valdosta (EG)

Segment EG is approximately 70 miles long and passes through five counties (Dougherty, Worth, Colquitt, Brooks, and Lowndes) and two planning regions: Southwest Georgia (Albany) and South Georgia (Valdosta).

Final results show a slightly positive (light green) impact for segment EG. The segment has some strongly positive aspects, particularly in the categories of increasing accessibility. It is also consistent with some stated infrastructure needs at a regional scale. However the alignment is hindered by substantial challenges with regard to social justice and impacts to historic and cultural assets.

3.7.1 Land Use & Planning

The EG segment is consistent with stated infrastructure goals for the Southwest Georgia planning region and more locally in Colquitt County. Both place importance on a project to widen GA-133, which reflects a capacity need that is consistent with the alignment of segment EG. Brooks and Lowndes are less explicit about the need for widening GA-133, likely due to their better proximity to I-75. The segment is consistent with economic policies in Colquitt County, where industrial development is desired along GA-133, and potentially in Brooks County, where higher wage jobs and retail opportunities are desired. Lowndes has little need for an additional interstate connection, but from a regional perspective the alignment could be beneficial. Lowndes is part of a tri-county initiative, “Triple Crown Hometowns,” intended to attract retirees to the area in order to diversify the economy. Easier access to Albany may benefit that effort.

On the downside, the segment may present a land use policy conflict with regard to impacts on prime agriculture and rural character. Colquitt and Brooks Counties both express a desire to maintain rural character in their comprehensive plans. The Worth County comprehensive plan seeks to “preserve the rural character of the area” and protect from “encroaching development.” Segment EG may exacerbate the trend of sprawl from Albany into Worth County. In Lowndes, sprawl is a major concern, where rural and city lines are becoming increasingly blurred. However whether this would



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be exacerbated by the alignment is unclear; the Valdosta area is currently growing to the northeast into Lanier and Echols County, not to the northwest in the direction of the segment alignment.

3.7.2 Community Benefits

Segment EG would greatly increase access to all services studied including hospitals, technical schools, and higher education facilities. It would link seven cities and five major employers. It is projected to positively impact populations without a high school diploma as access to training facilities would be increased.

In total the alignment could impact 16 populated places, whether cities, villages, or subdivisions.

On the downside, it has the potential to negatively impact and potentially isolate some populated areas, and could negatively impact populations in poverty, minorities, and the elderly. The segment could also potentially impact historic and cultural assets. According to GIS analysis, there are 26 historic sites and 25 churches within a half mile of the alignment along its length. Brooks County may demonstrate resistance to an interstate due to the county's inclusion of natural and cultural resource protection as a qualifier in their transportation policy.

In summary, the final results show a slightly positive (light green) impact for segment EG (Albany-Valdosta).

3.8 Albany-Camilla (EF)

Segment EF is approximately 20 miles long and passes through two counties (Dougherty and Mitchell). It lies within the Southwest Georgia planning region.

Final results show a mixed (yellow) impact for segment EF. It has positive impacts with regard to transportation and economic policies, but faces environmental and land use challenges. The community benefits it would provide are negligible.

3.8.1 Land Use & Planning

The EF segment is consistent with transportation and economic policies in Mitchell County. For example, the county is interested in extending I-185 (near Columbus) into the county. The county has a positive stance on interstate development in general, and more specifically seeks to promote industrial development and alleviate heavy truck congestion in Camilla. The alignment is also consistent with regional transportation policy. The Southwest Georgia RDC considers this route from Albany to Camilla to be one of the highest need corridors for public infrastructure and services



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in the region. The route would serve the Southwest Georgia Regional Airport, which is a regionally significant passenger and cargo airport with expected growth in its freight traffic services.

On the downside, segment EF may have an impact on the protected Flint River corridor in Dougherty County and wetlands south of Albany. This route from Albany to Camilla is considered a “scenic byway” in the Southwest Georgia regional plan. This reflects a position of protectiveness with regard to this corridor that would not seem to be consistent with an interstate. The alignment crosses “significant groundwater recharge” areas; however these groundwater recharge areas appear to be plentiful and the impact may be negligible.

3.8.2 Community Benefits

Compared to other alternatives, segment EF has negligible impacts with regard to social justice, accessibility to services, and impacts to populated places. It would link four cities and one major employer.

In total the alignment could impact seven populated places, whether cities, villages, or subdivisions.

In summary, the final results show a mixed (yellow) impact for segment EF (Albany-Camilla).

3.9 Camilla-Beachton through Grady County (FH West)

Segment FH West is approximately 44 miles long and passes through two counties in the study area (Mitchell and Grady). It lies within the Southwest Georgia planning region.

Final results show a slightly negative (light red) impact for segment FH West. This is one of two potential alignments for a connection between Camilla and Beachton. The other, FH East, received a mixed impact ranking.

3.9.1 Land Use & Planning

The FH West segment does not conflict with transportation policies in Mitchell County, but falls short of being consistent with them. Although the county is interstate friendly, the express desire in their transportation policy is for an interstate connection north to I-185, not south to Beachton. However, the segment may still address some issues, such as where the comprehensive plan seeks to alleviate heavy truck congestion in Camilla. In Grady County, the City of Cairo has a debt problem which could possibly be alleviated through tax revenues associated with interstate development. It could also contribute to the economic development goal of promoting industrial development in the southern area of Cairo. From the perspective of the Southwest Georgia planning region, FH West is



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designated as a high need corridor for public infrastructure and services – however, the region places more importance on FH East, which it considers among the highest need corridors in the region.

On the downside, segment FH West presents significant challenges with regard to land use policy and compatibility with adjacent existing land uses both Mitchell and Grady Counties. Protecting sensitive natural and cultural resources is a primary concern of Grady County's plan. Grady has reported occurrences of the Gopher Tortoise, a federally threatened species. The Ochlocknee River corridor, which runs near the proposed alignment, is emphasized as an important habitat and cultural resource to be protected. The alignment crosses the historic Red Hills area in Grady County, a regionally significant cultural and ecological resource. There are a high number of centennial farms in this area, which is considered by the Southwest Georgia planning region to be a potential destination for tourism. The alignment would also have a very significant negative impact on prime farmland in both counties, when measured in the number of acres potentially impacted. Finally, the segment could potentially contribute to a trend of sprawl around the City of Camilla in Mitchell County - a problem which is identified by both the county's comprehensive plan and the Southwest Georgia planning region. The alignment may also negatively impact wetlands in Mitchell County, south of Camilla, judging from Southwest Georgia regional planning maps. The segment demonstrates incompatibility with the regional context due to its potentially negative impact on key resources identified in the Southwest Georgia regional plan - natural, cultural, and touristic.

3.9.2 Community Benefits

The impact of segment FH West on social justice populations is both positive and negative, and therefore ranked "mixed impact." FH West would serve two cities and two major employers.

It is the only segment with no apparent potential for impacting populated places (cities, villages, and subdivisions), which is considered very positive.

On the downside, the segment contributes almost nothing with regard to increasing access to services (all segments other than FH East contribute more).

In summary, the final results show a slightly negative (light red) impact for segment FH West (Camilla-Beachton through Grady County).

3.10 Camilla-Beachton through Thomas County (FH East)

Segment FH East is approximately 46 miles long and passes through two counties in the study area (Mitchell and Thomas). It lies within the Southwest Georgia planning region.



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Final results show a mixed impact for segment FH East. This is one of two potential alignments for a connection between Camilla and Beachton. The other, FH West, received a slightly negative (light red) impact ranking.

3.10.1 Land Use & Planning

The FH East segment has both positive and negative impacts across almost all categories evaluated, yielding mixed results. This ranking was in zoning, and reflects that there are measures in place that demonstrate a policy position that anticipates or allows for highway uses. FH East is considered by the Southwest Georgia planning region to be one of the highest need corridors for public infrastructure and services in the region. However this observation must be qualified by the fact that the segment runs along a regionally designated “scenic byway.” This reflects a position of protectiveness on the part of the Southwest Georgia planning region with regard to this corridor that would not seem to be consistent with an interstate. As with FH West, the FH East segment does not conflict with transportation policies in Mitchell County, but falls short of being consistent with them (see 3.7.1). The alignment would serve a state correctional facility in Mitchell County.

On the downside, segment FH East presents conflicts with economic development policies in Thomas County and land use policies in both Thomas and Mitchell Counties. Thomas County’s economic development goals are focused on tourism, with an emphasis on the Ochlocknee and Aucilla Rivers, Red Hills area, and low-intensity land-extensive activities such as plantation hunting. Disruption to these natural features or prime hunting areas would have a very negative impact. The alignment would also have a very significant negative impact on prime farmland in both counties: the potential disturbance to prime farmland in this 46-mile segment is nearly equivalent to the potential disturbance in the 81-mile length of segment AC (Albany-Columbus) when measured in the number of acres potentially impacted. As is the case with FH West, the segment could potentially contribute to a trend of sprawl around the City of Camilla in Mitchell County - a problem which is identified by both the county’s comprehensive plan and the Southwest Georgia planning region.

3.10.2 Community Benefits

Segment FH East has both positive and negative aspects on social justice populations, and therefore is ranked “mixed impact.” FH East would serve four cities and one major employer.

In total the alignment could impact five populated places, whether cities, villages, or subdivisions.

On the downside, the segment contributes almost nothing with regard to increasing access to services (all other segments including FH West contribute more).



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In summary, the final results show a slightly negative (light red) impact for segment FH East (Camilla-Beachton through Thomas County).

3.11 Conclusions

These conclusions are reached with an acknowledgment of certain limitations, which are outlined under section 1.2 *Limitations and Intent of the Study*. Conclusions are presented with these limitations as an underlying premise.

3.11.1 Summary of Rankings

Final results show that the Albany-Cordele segment (BC) has an overall positive impact on land use and community benefits. Of all of the alignments, this segment has the most “overall positive” rankings in the categories studied. It presents challenges with regard to social justice, but demonstrates consistency with regional context and transportation policy, increases accessibility to services, and has limited impact to historical and cultural assets and prime agriculture. It does not have a significant impact with regard to connecting major employers, although it links three cities.

The Albany-Valdosta (EG) and the Albany-Tifton (CD) alignments have an overall slightly positive impact. Both present challenges with regard to social justice and impacts to historic and cultural assets. Segment EG also negatively impacts prime agriculture. However both demonstrate consistency and positive impacts in the areas of regional context, economic development policy, and increasing accessibility to services. Segment CD connects five major employers and seven cities. The only segment with a greater number of job center connections is AC (Albany-Columbus). Segment EG ranks higher than segment CD in the categories of access to job training and consistency with transportation policies.

The Albany-Camilla segment (EF), the Camilla-Beachton segment through Thomas County (FH East), and the connector segment within Albany (CE) have overall mixed impacts. Segment CE performed very well with regard to its limited impacts to both prime agriculture and historic and cultural assets. However it presented significant challenges with regard to social justice - although it is a short 2-mile connector segment within Albany, it travels through a much more densely populated area than most other segments. Segment FH East is consistent with economic development policies, but performs poorly in the categories of increasing access to services and impacts to prime agriculture. It also reflects inconsistency with land use, and may be challenging from a regional perspective due to potential impacts to the Red Hills historic area. Segment EF is consistent with economic development and transportation policies, and performs very well with regard to historic and cultural assets impacts. However it is inconsistent with land use policies and



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has limited benefits with regard to increasing accessibility or job center connectivity due to the lower population it would serve compared to other alignments.

The Albany-Columbus segment (AC) and the Camilla-Beachton segment through Grady County (FH West) have an overall negative impact on land use and provision of community benefits. FH West performs poorly with regard to increasing access to services, and has a very negative impact on prime agriculture. The FH West alignment also performs poorly in terms of the regional context, as it may negatively impact the Red Hills historic area and habitat of a federally threatened species. On the positive side, FH West is the only alignment that did not present conflicts with existing cities, villages, and subdivisions. Segment AC performs well with regard to connecting job centers. It connects the most cities and major employers of any segment, in part because of its greater length. For this reason, it also performs well in the category of increasing accessibility to services. Segment AC has a very negative impact with regard to multiple social justice performance measures, on prime agriculture, and on existing cities, villages, and subdivisions. Segment AC also has an extremely high likelihood of negative impacts to historic and cultural assets, with approximately four times more assets potentially impacted as any other segment.

3.12 Summary of Findings by Segment

Bigger impacts, either significantly more positive or significantly more negative than other segments in the same category, were observed in the following segments: Albany-Columbus (AC), Albany-Cordele (BC), Albany-Tifton (CD), and Albany-Valdosta (EG). The bigger impacts in these segments, which occurred across several performance measures, is presumably due to the fact that these segments affect the largest areas of population. Affected population was measured by census blocks intersected by the segment swaths, which are offset a half mile on either side of the potential alignment. These segments each affected a population over 30,000, with the highest population (just over 83,000) affected by segment AC. Notable results include:

- Segments AC, BC, CD, and EG were ranked among the most negative with regard to impacting existing cities, villages and subdivisions, populations in poverty, elderly populations, and minority populations. Segments AC, CD, and EG were ranked the most negative with regard to impacting historic and cultural assets.
- Segments AC, BC, CD, and EG were evaluated as having positive outcomes as they run through highly populated areas - most notably with regard to serving a larger population with greater access to services, including access to hospitals, educational facilities, and employment centers. AC, CD, and EG create very positive outcomes with regard to connecting people to jobs. CD and EG connect five major employers and seven cities each. AC connects 11 major employers and eight cities.



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The Albany-Camilla segment (EF) had mixed impacts in almost every category. Compared to other alignments, the impacts to community benefits are negligible. Although Camilla is interstate friendly, the region considers this route to be a “scenic byway,” which suggests a level of protectiveness of the corridor that would not be consistent with an interstate. (Refer to Appendix D for additional details.)

The Camilla-Beachton segments (FH East and FH West), with the same origin and destination, should be considered as either/or alternatives. With regard to community benefits, the two ranked equivalently in all but one category: FH East performed much better with regard to impacting existing cities, villages and subdivisions. In land use categories, FH West ranked lower than FH East on many fronts, and received a lower overall ranking as a result. However one important distinguishing factor is apparent at the regional scale. A key concern in this area from the perspective of the Southwest Georgia planning region is stewardship of the historic Red Hills area and protection of federally threatened species, both of which are primarily located within Grady County and would be impacted most negatively by FH West (making FH East a better choice from a regional perspective).

Segment CE (connector with Albany) must be viewed as something of an outlier in this study due to its much shorter length (two miles) in comparison to the other segments, which range from approximately 20 to 80 miles in length. Because impacts were measured in raw numbers (number of historic assets impacted, number of persons impacted), segment CE’s true impacts are somewhat hidden by the fact that as a shorter segment, it will affect numerically fewer people and places. However, because it runs through a densely populated area (Albany), its true impacts would be substantial. If this segment was to move forward toward reality, it would require further study (as would all segments).

3.13 Overview of Results

An overview of the results reveals that negative rankings were typically due to impacts on historic or cultural assets, land use (either conflicts with prime agriculture or inconsistencies with existing land use plans), or social justice. Positive rankings were typically associated with transportation, economic development, zoning, regional context, and access to services.